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LONE-STAR LIGHTS

Belle Hunt Shorrbridge

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LONE-STAR LIGHTS



Belle Hunt Shortridge

LONE-STAR LIGHTS

BY
BELLE HUNT SHORTRIDGE

35
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JAMES MCCARROLL



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BY BELLE HUNT SHORTRIDGE.

Dedication.

TEXAS!

EMPIRE majestic, with thy head so proud,
Pillowed on mountain heights of snow and cloud ;
And kingly feet laved by the tepid tide
Of Aztec waters, sun-kissed, free and wide!
Realm of eternal Spring and blessedness,
Of flower's breath, and mock-bird songs that cease
Not, all the golden months of all the year!
Land of cerulean sky, low-dipped, and clear!
Oh, prairies boundless, breeze-tossed, cattle-nipped!
Oh, hidden streams, translucent and deer-sipped!
Oh, sweet hills verdant-footed, purple-hazed!
Oh, fields of cotton-snow*and golden maize,
Oh, valleys of low-lying, blue-green wheat,
Up where the mesa and the cold waves meet!
What wonder that men's blood leapt forth, to flow
Chivalric, for thee, at the Alamo?
Land of my birth, and soul's intensest love!
Dear is thy soil, thy calm, blue sky, above ;
Dear are thy aims to all my eager heart,
And dear thy people, of myself a part.
Dear is thy soil? It holds my sacred dead,
And precious living! Thus, I lift my head,
And eyes, and heart, across a continent,
Baring to thee this holy sentiment.
This little volume, and its fate, I lay
Upon thy big heart's largess. Is it "Nay,
We are too busy, empire-building, child,
To loiter, dallying with thy blossoms wild,
And pretty little heart-songs. Go thy way ;
We'll hearken to thee on some idler day" ?
But, friends, some idler day we may be dead,
And all these words, so comforting, unsaid!
See, I am speaking to the personal heart,
And it is well : no great things ever start
From cold concretions. Give me one heart's smile,
And I will win the whole world, after-while.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE do not appear to be many drops of tired, venous blood creeping through this admirable collection of poems. On the contrary, a bright, arterial tide, flashing with true genius and pulsating with exalted poetic fervor, flows throughout almost every stanza. This speaks well for the "Lone-Star State," whose daughter and ardent worshipper Mrs. Shortridge is. The refinement, strength, originality, and versatility of this authoress will be recognized at once by those who are given to the harmony of numbers when wedded to great beauty and profound thought. In a literary and artistic sense this volume is of unusual excellence, and should command wide-spread patronage.

JAMES MCCARROLL.

NEW YORK, *November*, 1890.

LONE-STAR LIGHTS.

MY SISTER,

KATE HUNT CRADDOCK.

I HAVE the sweetest haven
Of any coast on earth ;
Where not a breaker heaveth,
Nor any wind hath birth.
The secret ? Listen—do not start!—
My sister's heart !

I have the bluest heaven
That ever leaned o'er sea ;
The calmest, clearest sky-world,
To bend and smile on me.
Soft ! it is, too, a great surprise—
My sister's eyes !

I have a lamp Aladdin,
Most commonplace and small :
You'd see it every day, most,
And wonder not at all.
Yet, it invokes the genii band—
My sister's hand !

LONE-STAR LIGHTS.

I have the prettiest picture,
That smiles, and frowns, and nods.
The canvas is—my memory !
The painter's hand was—God's !
It follows me from place to place—
My sister's face !

There is "another of me
With all the bad rubbed out."
The spirit seems *my* spirit,
Yet, it is gird about
With light, and beauty wonderful!—
My sister-soul !

PEACH-BLOSSOM TIME.

Down in the orchards the wild birds are singing,
 " Peach-blossom time !"
White-petalled, gold-hearted daisies are nodding,
 " Peach-blossom time !"
South winds are blowing, and bear on their pinions
 Fragrance sublime,
Stolen from groves of magnolia and orange,
 In sunnier clime.

Hearts are rejoicing and nature o'er-flowing,
 'Tis peach-blossom time !
Blue-birds are mating, and billing, and cooing,
 " Peach-blossom time !"
Peach-blossom time, with its wondrous elixir,
 Bounding along,
From tip-toe to temple; and oh ! how the heart-strings
 Vibrate with the song !

Open, O shell-tinted, delicate petals,
 Soft as the light,
Yield up th' aroma wrapt up in your bosoms
 Of rose-tint and white !
Music and melody ring in the wood-lands
 Morn, noon, and night,
Bursting from sweet, feathered throats, in a rapture
 Of wildest delight !

LONE-STAR LIGHTS.

Strange doth it seem that these orchards of blossom
 A few weeks ago
Stood facing the norther, their bare arms extended,
 Laden with snow;
But warm rains and sunshine, and God's wondrous power
 And loving design,
Hath clothed them in garments surpassing all texture
 Of hands not divine.

Then open your dainty hearts, pour out their fragrance,
 Ablution divine !
While angel-voice sings, in the breeze to the earth-land,
 " Peach-blossom time !"

AD ASTRA.

O SKYLARK, piercing heaven's unclouded blue!
My soul yearns after and would follow thee;
Spurning this nether world of dross and clay,
Afloat on that unfathomable sea
Where earth-born cares vex not, and time and space
Are naught; where freedom lives, and destiny
Plies not so slow a shuttle through the web
Of man's sure growth toward immortality.
Curb not th' ambitious soul's profound desire;
Set not a bound to man's attainment here:
Just what the mind can grasp, the heart can dare,
So much is possible, is just, is clear.
To what extent man is an idealist,
Is he divine, omnipotent. Yet, fair
As morn in May-time, must he ever keep
That Ideal glowing in his life's mid-air.
Come weal, come woe, come triumph or defeat,
Still must it throb and quicken, low, yet strong,
That aim and purpose—like the deep bassoon
In orchestration, bearing up the song,
In harmony sonorous—lost to those
“Who hear the music, and yet miss the tune,”
But to his ears clear as the liquid notes
A mocking-bird trills, on a night in June.
For Solomon arose the ivory throne
O'erlaid with gold, when Solomon decreed.
Man, arrogant, is master of his fate.
Wherein a brave heart wills, it doth succeed.

LONE-STAR LIGHTS.

Go, then, my soul, down into Afric sands,
 And fetch the ivory for this beauteous throne;
 Hunt down the huge beast in his jungle lair,
 And wrench the white tusk from his great jaw-bone.
 Pause not, but dare—intrepid and alone,
 Unmindful of the Upas, and the coils
 Of venomed serpents where thy foot descends,—
 It is the master-foot, and these its spoils!
 Go, then, my heart, launched on the silent sea,
 To Gopher, where the red gold lieth deep
 Within the mountain-caverns; delve thou there,
 Unearth the treasures from their torpid sleep
 Of centuries, and bear them here, to melt
 In lace-like tracery o'er the chaste background
 Where we shall stand! And, soul, go further down—
 To Lebanon, where kings of beasts are found;
 Yoke two—the fiercest; lead them here to me,
 That I may lay my fragile, human hand
 On their imperial heads, and overcome
 Brute-force by mind's effulgence; and command
 That docile reverence which our childhood saw
 In Una's lion, with his lamb-like tread,
 Guided by love. Perchance in this wide world
 All remnant of the art triumphant is not dead!

* * * * * *

What shall we do, O soul! when you and I
 Stand, flushed, triumphant, on some dizzy height,
 Drunk on ambition's wine, and satiate
 With life's full recompense, and keen delight?
 Like Alexander, bow our crownèd heads
 Upon our hands victorious, and weep
 Because no other valorous worlds remain
 To crumble at our swords' imperious sweep?
 Ah no! There will be better things to do,

For you and me. To carve the ivory throne
Into styli; to write the glowing truth,
Clean-cut and luminous, in every zone
Where hearts are leal, minds penetrating; where
The virgin lamps of genius yet endure,
Despite the fogs of superstitious creeds,
That would their cleansing, steadfast flames obscure.
The gold to coin in dollars, to buy bread
For little, helpless children, hungering;
The beasts, unfettered, to send safely forth,
Man's friend, Love's convert. Thus we loudly sing,
"Ad Astra!—onward to the burning stars,
O soul aspiring! lag not by the way
Despondent. See the light on land and sea,
That leadeth to the brink of perfect day!"

LOVE'S DEFIANCE.

WHAT! here again with thy mocking eyes,
Thou beautiful wraith of a buried past!
Thou half-guessed scent of a pressed white rose.
Of a summer too fleet and fair to last!
Ah me! since then I have learned so much
Of the ways of the world and the ways of men,
I had dreamed I was stoical, worldly-wise;
I did not think I would stumble again.
I had told my heart that it all was best;
My heart had looked in my eyes and smiled
A smile incredulous, sensuous, rare,
Till it, somehow or other, my faith beguiled.
I had stood by the bier of that sweet old love
And watched it die as a mortal may;
I had closed its eyes with a reverent touch,
And folded the still white hands away;
And I smiled with the death dew lingering yet
On my finger-tips: I was sore beset
With the horror that some one would see and know
That my idol was clay! I cannot forget,
Though I have forgiven. Ah! living or dead,
Or buried, or thrilling with life's red wine,
Thou art my love and my own heart's blood.
Thou art mine own, and I am thine!
See! 'tis a miracle, solve it who can,—
A woman's heart is a wonderful thing.
The world is its kingdom, it reigneth supreme,
And Love is its vanquished rose-yoked king.

October, 1889.

Come to thy throne in my heart's deep core;
Kiss me straight on the lips anew;
Down on your knees and homage pay
To the woman who conquers a man like you.

AFTERWHILE.

HEART of mine, be not so heavy;
Sad eyes, try to smile;
Surely better days are coming
Afterwhile!

Long the leaden clouds have rested
On the mountain's crest,
But God's sunshine is behind them
In the west.

For awhile, dear love, our pathways
Blossomed side by side,
Till the frown of Fate between them
Parted wide.

But across the dreary chasm
I can catch thy smile—
Stretching out my hand, I'll clasp thine,
Afterwhile.

IN MY HAMMOCK.

JULY 15, 1889.

O NIGHT, so soft and dim ! when tired eyes
 May rest, all uncomplaining, where they list.
O night, so blue and dewy ! dove-winged skies,
 Just touched with glory, where the red sun kissed.
I lay my weary head upon thy heart,
 I hear it throb, and I am comforted !
I seem from earth and care something apart,
 So cool and tranquil grows the busy head.
All day the unloved world hath held me fast,
 A fettered prisoner, in its tedious ways;
All day the unloved people came and passed,
 And spoke, and stared, as in all other days.
May not a creature have a creature's mood ?
 May not a soul grow tired of playing gay ?
May not a woman look in her own heart
 And say, " Just you and I commune to-day ?"
Sweet night ! thou art so restful, wise, and kind,
 Dropping thy shielding curtains all about;
Blending the shadows, softened, undefined,
 Putting high lights—and curious eyes—to rout.
Reach down thy velvet arms, and press me close,
 Beam soft thy starry eyes into mine own;
Blow sweet thy cooling winds on bud and rose,
 Welcome where late the day's hot breath hath blown.
Sweep low the silken wing of bat, or bird,

—I do not fear thy shy, innoxious guests—
Across my fretful brow. Some fancy stirred
By their light wings, may prove of heaven blessed.
O wondrous majesty of space and light!
Up where the burning fire-worlds plunge along,
In orbits wide, God-measured, softly bright,
Singing their mighty, endless, spherul song,
I long for wings, that I may soar away,
And stand—a happy mariner, alone—
Upon that sea so luminous, and pay
Homage beneath the rings of Saturn's throne.
I long for something high, and clear, and bright;
I am so tired of vainly grovelling here!
I long for rest! O friendly, soothing night,
Thy blessing! Ah!—the benedictial tear,
A dew-drop on my cheek! Sing low, oh! breeze!
Fan soft as angel wings. I am so calm!
Stir not a green leaf in the silent trees,
And steep my soul in Lethe's holy balm.
Good-night, O big, loud, noisy, garish world!
They may not miss me in the quiet home;
Off on the shoreless sea my fancies whirled,
I sink, and wish the day may never come!

“BEXIE.”

BEXIE is not beautiful,—
That is, as women go,
With tints, and airs, and graces,
Made up for pomp and show.
But she is more than beautiful
Of soul, and heart, and gaze;
And most bewilderingly fair
Are Bexie's dainty ways.

A creature most complex is she
Of aim, capacity;
Who plays divinest music—
Then runs and makes the tea.
She *teaches* stupid children
(And *bears* the other kind),
And is so equipoised you can
Not guess what's in her mind.

I'm mad in love with Bexie,
And wouldn't do a thing
To reap her scorn—no more, indeed,
Than if she were a queen,
And I her heel-pressed minion,
Kicked and caressed by starts.
She is a queen is Bexie—
A trump, and Queen of Hearts.

FORNEY, TEXAS.

JEFFERSON DAVIS, DEAD.

So stops a nation's throbbing, human heart ;
So fades a sweet dream into viewless air ;
So dies a dear hope like a glowing spark
That shed a white light on a land so fair.
O widowed South ! bend low thy regal head ;
Draw close thy weeds funereal, black as night
On shore Plutonian ; life itself is dead,
And day hath faded into endless night.
Toll, toll, ye bells, in every dome and spire,
Pour mournful music on the Christmas-tide ;
The Christ born to us can no solace bring,—
Before His birth He lieth crucified.
Thou fallen hero, with a man's warm heart,
That lived and suffered, and was strong to dare ;
Thou king unconquered, whom not death could fright,—
Who had the nerve to suffer and forbear.

“ No citizen of these United States ? ”
No cringing coward and betrayer thou,
To blacken thy white soul subserviently,
Taking the empty, base allegiance vow.

No flags half-mast on fair Columbia's domes ?
No tribute national to honor thee ?
If all the North should rend her silken clothes,
And kiss the ground on penitential knee ;
If all the crepe within her mighty stores

Were draped from to town, till earth and sky
Were one black cloud of mourning and despair,
And all her wardens on the house-tops cry
“Woe! woe!”—she could not add, nor take
One jot or tittle from thy majesty!
Her flags, though flouted in high Heaven’s face,
Could not insult us nor dishonor thee.

Sleep on, thou unpolluted, holy clay!

Sleep well, thou friend and father! free at last
To lay aside thy heritage of woe.

Thy galling mem’ries of a tragic past!

Soft rest thy honored head on Mother Earth,—

On *Southern* earth, and crowned with Southern flowers.

We take thy sacred body to our hearts,

And warm and guard it through these tearful hours,
Until its final rendering to the tomb.

Thou art not dead, nor conquered; rest thee sweet,

And live eternal in our sun-lit land,

When flags are rotten at Columbia’s feet!

Let every foot of this fair, fertile soil—

For whose redemption he hath lived and died—

Rest free from plough and harrow, while he lies

In state majestic; no small thing denied

In church, nor state, nor commerce to attest

The personal woe on every loyal head,

While incarnated Hope, with folded wings,

Broods o’er the casket of the sacred dead.

A RIDE.

THE calendar said winter, but the air said spring,
And May laughed in February's face;
The wild-plum budded, and the fences were wreathed
With dewberry blossoms, like lace.
The sky leaned down like a blue China bowl
Not a fleck in its pure transparency.
Save a great gold rim in the sun-kissed west,
Giving tone to the dead serenity.
A south wind gathered all the fragrance far and near
And breathed it on the cheek like a kiss,
A great bird soared in the sky cerulean,
A monarch in those realms of bliss.
The prairie was asmile with the open starry eyes
Of spring beauties, buttercups and blue,
Tiny, dainty, fragrant blossoms, too small to name,
But sweet enough to thrill you through and through.
A field-lark whistled 'mong the dead cotton stalks,
Or cleaved the air with glowing yellow breast
Like a stolen dash of gold from the great gold rim
Over there, in the golden west.
All the world was at peace, and the subtle charm crept
On tip-toe, as it were, into my heart;
All bitterness and longing, all repining and regret,
Seemed from life and my soul so far apart.
And I caught God's hand, as it were, and held it warm
And looked up to the way of life, so sweet,
With the fallen, faded, sordid things of this vain world
All melted in the dust beneath my feet.

LONE-STAR LIGHTS.

Then I gazed in the eyes of a friend whom I love,
And saw the same mute gladness shining there;
Though we said not a word, each heart knew the truth,
And that silence was more eloquent than prayer.
So the sun dropped down on his couch of red and gold,
And twilight came in sandals o'er the hill,
With her long dun veil trailing on the dewy grass,
And her finger on her lips, which said "Be still,"
Till our awed hearts trembled; when, lo! upon the night
A mocking-bird poured forth a rhapsody
That caught up the silence and shattered it in bits
Of thrilling, nervous, wildest melody.
So the world moves on in the old, prosaic way,
Only now and then the heavy shadows lift,
That the sensitive may know just a foretaste of bliss
In the heart's world beyond the silver rift.

TERRELL, TEX., Feb. 8, 1890.

DECATUR, WISE COUNTY, TEXAS.

JULY 23, 1889.

ONCE more to the big-hearted land of my birth,
Once more to the valleys and hills,
Once more to the mist on the blue mountain's peak,
And the sound of the fresh flowing rills !
Once more to the breezes, as soft as the lips
Of those that we love ! Once again
To the kingdom of Nature, the Temple of God,
Where freedom and fearlessness reign !
O blue peaks majestic, so near, yet so far,
Up close to the warmth of God's smile,
In the path of the stars, and the calm, heavenly ways,
That the storm-tossed wanderer beguile !
Oh, peaceful and restful thy solemn dirr heights,
With the sky bending over serene !
Oh cooling and dewy thy shadowy sides,
With the deep, flowing rivers between !
I long for a season of rest on thy heart ;
I yearn for a surcease of pain,
Begot of the pitiful struggle of life,
And the gall of ambition's rude chain.
I want to climb up till my head is awlirl,
And my limbs are atremble and weak
With the effort of climbing, and then to lie down,
And wait for an angel to seek
And to find and comfort me, saying, " Sleep on,

Wayward child of ambition. Be still,
Drink the dews of forgetfulness, lotus, and ease;
And rest on this far-away hill."
I am tired of philosophies, science, and art ;
I am sick to the soul of desire ;
I want to be idle in body and mind,
Never more to regret or aspire.
I am tired of books and of people—so tired !—
And of church-bells, and bonnets, and " calls ;"
I want to do nothing more conventional
Than a leaf when it withers and falls.
I want to lie down in the lush, tender grass,
With my head on my arms, and my eyes
Uplifted to nothingness, tranquil and vague,
In the soft China blue of these skies.
I want to count pebbles, hunt birds' nests and flowers,
And wade in some rocky-bed stream;
I want to do nothing for hours upon hours,
But vegetate, slumber, and dream.
Oh, life is a sorrowful thing at its best
To those who are keen to its pain,
Whose nerves are attuned to a sensitive key,
To suffer and suffer again;
Never deaf to the sound of an every-day sigh,
Never dull to the sight of a tear;
Awake to the deep undercurrent of woe
That sobs in the century's ear,
As the pilgrims of life tread the old beaten track,
And are patient to stumble and fall
By the wayside;—or, what is more pitiful still,
Never know that they stumble at all.

But would we go back—we who suffer, but know—
To the old bliss of ignorance ? aye,

To the dull, gross, bucolic, unthrilling, unmoved
Unfeeling existence? Not I;
Not you, fellow-thinker. "Better a worm,
And feed on the mulberry leaves
Of Daphne, than be a king's guest." So we part;
So we gather up, sighing, life's sheaves,
With the wheat and the tares intermingled therein,
And, holding them fast, trudge along,
As purposeless, helpless, as fanciful, vague,
As the gist of this fanciful song.

WHEN THOU ART GONE.

ALL gladness from my loving heart is fled,
All lightness from my tired, lagging feet ;
The world is desolate, bright Summer dead,
With rustling, brown leaves for her winding-sheet !
And mournful north winds 'gainst the casements beat,
When thou art gone.

The autumn sun shines on my pallid cheek,
But brings no flush of summer roses there :
They blossomed, once, beneath thy ardent gaze,
Thy loving gaze, that told me I was fair.
All things are stale and desolate, my dear,
When thou art gone.

Come home to bless me with thy loving eyes
So beautiful ! One tender glance from thee
Is worth the heart's blood of all other men.
The lightest touch of thy dear hand to me
Is bliss divine. My soul goes after thee,
When thou art gone.

Come home : the world is wide, and fair to see ;
But life is short,—too short to be apart.
Come home, beloved one : I cannot bear
To see thy empty place ; it breaks my heart !
Come home : unbidden tears so easy start
When thou art gone !

HELEN HUNT JACKSON'S GRAVE.

SNOW-BOUND, snow-crowned, on Cheyenne's lonely height
She lies and is "at rest." the world's rude din
Breaks not that frozen silence ; day and night
The tired worker sleeps, rocked soft within
The "peaceful cradle" of her own loved vale,
Lulled by the splash of waters all the while,
And purple mountain mists and slumbrous dale,
Biding the resurrection of spring's smile,
To wake, and throb, and, bursting winter's chain,
Leap forth to blossom ; when the wild pink rose
Puts out its fragrant arms to hug the grave,
And all its sweet breath to the windward throws.
Just she and God possess those sacred heights.
No noisy tourist, now, with book or knife,
Intrudes familiarly upon the dead,
Who shrank so from intrusion in her life.
Just she and Nature, whom she loved so well,
At whose chaste shrine she breathed cathedral rite
On quiet Sabbaths, when gregarious throngs
Crowded the city churches. Pure and bright
(Like to her own fine nature, glowing, warm)
She ever found that altar, while within
Her soul responsive liquid songs were born,
To bless that world of fretfulness and sin.
No marble shaft lifts up its shop-made dome
To cry in Heaven's face this woman's name,
Who humbly called herself a "fallow field,"
Who worked for God and right, not gold and fame.

But ruder, grander, more imperishable far,
That growing mound piled up by reverent hands,
That deathless monument of rock and spar
That rises like a giant in those lands
Of rock-ribbed giants ; each stone eloquent
Cries, " Lo, we mark a benedictial spot ;
Tread lightly, for the ground is holy here,"
Where lies a woman who herself forgot,
Her woes of widowhood, and anguish keen
Of waxen baby fingers, all her own
Taken at one fell blow to crush the rose
Of her sweet heart, before it was full-blown ;
A woman who, to help a fallen race,
Gave " of herself," in Christlike modesty,
Toiling the barbarous, stolid tribes among,
Pointing the way to higher destiny.
Dead to all thought but of God's image there
Degraded, which with her two fragile hands
She lifted up, and burnished till it glowed
As fair and free as grace these Christian lands.
A nature rare and radiant, nerves attuned
To all those subtile thrills of atmosphere,
To lights and shadows on the mountain sides,
To hum of bird and insect, far and near ;
Who laid a warm hand on the great world's pulse,
And felt it throb and quiver, listening low
To voice of God and angels all the while,
Feeling the blue-eyed mountain floweret blow ;
Who roamed the canyons, safe from storm and beast,
Nor frightened from her nest the timid dove ;
Whose songs were songs of helpfulness and peace,
Whose ways were ways of gentleness and love.

COLORADO SPRINGS, COL., 1889.

WILD-PLUM BLOSSOMS.

THERE'S a blue-bird concert on the old spring branch,
When the wild-plum blossoms are ablow :
 Such a billing and a cooing,
 Such a fussing and a wooing,
And a building nests among the branches low !

THERE'S a great, big squirming in the insect world,
When the wild-plum blossoms are ablow :
 Such a creeping from the bogs,
 Such a chirping on dead logs,
And a blinking in the sun's warm glow !

THERE'S a full-dress party on the prairies wide,
When the wild-plum blossoms are ablow :
 " Misses Daisy," all in gold,
 And most wondrous to behold ;
And " Spring Beauties," striped with crimson, in a row !

THERE'S a strange, new throbbing, in this heart of mine
When the wild-plum blossoms are ablow :
 " Carpe diem !" is the cry,
 " While the golden moments fly,
Ope the door to all the gladness that you know."

THERE'S a sly dare-devil in this heart of mine,
Then the wild-plum blossoms are ablow :
 " It is spring ! spring ! spring !"
 Hear the glad voices sing,
 " Live and love and smile,—be happy here below !"

TO JAMES MCCARROLL.

THOU gentle, helpful friend,
Whom God hath left to keep watch on this shore,
Nor let thy sweet life end
Till thou hast helped a timid wanderer o'er!

O wise, divining heart,
That comprehendeth great things, yet doth smile
To see the pale blush start
That promiseth the full rose, after-while!

Thou friend of Poet, Sage;
Thou sweet familiar in the realms of Art;
Thou King of Song thyself,
With youth perpetual in thy regal heart!—

What can Death do to thee,
But waft thy brightness to a brighter land
To shine eternally?
I kneel, and kiss thy toiling, aged hand.

NEW YORK, Oct. 25, 1890.

SANCTUM SANCTORUM.

I THANK Thee, God, for this sweet inner shrine,
 That's all mine own. No sound can reach so deep,
 No ear can hear the pulsing of the tides
 Upon the heart-shore, when the breakers sweep.
 Here I am free, and Love is freer still,
 To stretch warm arms, and bid, with kisses sweet,
 That other self, that key-note soft and clear,
 Without which life's grand psalm were incomplete.

No prying eye may read its secret scroll;
 No vile-tongued slander slime its altar o'er;
 No glaring, noontide scrutiny profane
 The blood-veined tracery on its sacred floor.
 Twin angels guard its portals: fair are they,
 With pinions white, and flaming, keen-edged sword—
 "Integrity" and "Peace." Not Satan's hosts
 Can enter in unbid,—nor, e'en Thou, Lord!

I thank Thee for this inner Temple court,—
 This one place where the soul may disarray,
 And lie down in its godlike nudity,
 Drinking life's nectar, like a child in May,
 That loiters 'long the star-eyed daisy-path
 Till Spring-time languor creeps into his eyes,
 His sensuous brain, his laggard limbs, and lo!
 Satiated in the blissful Now, he lies!

Two windows light this beauteous Temple's court—
Mine eyes! Though fine their silken, fringed shade,
They, too, are *mine*—impervious to the stare
Of curious eyes outside. These Thou hast made.
I thank Thee, God; and down the corridors
No echo wakens what my soul may say;
What Image glows upon this luminous shrine,
No power of Art or Science can portray.

TO THE PICKWICK CLUB.

(New Orleans.)

On dit that the club-life is bad,
A rose-path to pitfalls of vice,
Propitious to red chips, dice box, and cocktails—
All sorts of the “naughty-but-nice.”

That the way it “counts up” is a sin
And a shame to *l'homme de famille*;
Inclines him to yawn at the sight of an urn
At the head of an every-day meal.

On dit that the club-man is “fresh,”
Luxurious, lazy, and spoiled;
Given over to very late hours, *café-noir*,
And snipe *faisandée* but half-broiled!

That he breakfasts in bed ten A.M.,
When the children are all off to school;
And “dines at the club,” coming home in the night,
So knows not his own—as a rule.

I'll confess this "types up" mighty bad,
And of some clubs may be all quite true;
But The Pickwick!—dear me, to think such things of thee
Would engulf me in indigo blue.

Thou majestic, respectable pile
Of brownstone and solid plate-glass,
With wood-work substantial, and carpets dark-hued,
Soft muffling the footfalls that pass

Up and down the long corridors,—surely,
Nothing "lighter" than Blackstone and Pitt,
Topics national, science, and decent old Port,
And grave, Chesterfieldian wit,

Has startled the echoes in chambers
So sombre of mien, atmosphere
So artistic, and walls lined with rare old book-shelves
Of rosewood, time-worn and severe.

And yet from thy cellars comes forth
An old vintage, cob-webbed and divine,
Which, opened and quaffed, takes mighty sound heads
"Wool-gathering" to heights Apennine;

That betrays in the most English wit
A flavor too Frenchy—bizarre
Putting twists on the tip of a cotton-king's tongue
Which have not the least business there.

But thy green-turtle soup—superfinè!
And thy bruleau—beyond all compare!
Thy claret (it's smuggled, I'll wager, off "tramps")
That ply between our coasts and fair

Sunny France, and the vineyards of Spain),
Ports, Sauternes, Madeiras sun-kissed,
And a Champagne-frappé whose bewildering wiles
Not old Merlin himself could resist.

But three cheers for this excellent
(Their rotund foster-father's own sons,
Who believed in the good things of this mundane sphere,
And in youth while the sand of life runs)!

I don't blame them for this blest retreat,
Where cigars are not under a ban,
And "shams" and lace tidies obstruct not the feet;
And I'd join them—"if I were a man."

A THRENODY.

O heart! you and I cannot sit here and sing,
For life hath been crowned with a sorrowful thing;
All the world is a-weeping, the death-watch a-keeping—
We have seen Love die,
You and I.

Like a sudden blue chill on a midsummer's day,
When the yellow corn danced in the footsteps of May,
His pulses grew cold, his caress not so bold—
And we saw Love die,
You and I.

Oh, we hugged him tumultuously up to our heart,
We kissed him, and cried, "You and I cannot part;"
But the kisses were vain, came not warm back again—
And we watched Love die,
You and I.

And what is there left in this work-a-day world,
Since Love hath his white wings of blessedness furled
For you and for me? Just a mute agony—
Since we saw Love die,
You and I.

Ah, the silent white lips, erst so warm and so red,
Now bloodless and smileless, yea, frozen and dead!
Oh for one human touch! Is it asking too much—
Since we let Love die,
You and I?

So endeth the lesson; amen! and adieu!
'Twas a sweet little Eden in life, all for you;
As for me, well-a-day, I can't sing the old way—
Since we let Love die,
You and I

ROBIN REDBREAST.

I'm a robin-redbreast, and I've built me a nest
In the boughs of an old apple-tree,
Where the blossoms, snow-white, drift around me at night,
Just as soft and sweet as can be.
I'm a happy old "bach" (and they say, quite a catch),
And I really did think, for awhile,
That I'd find me a wife, whom I'd love as my life,
And who'd live in the light of my smile.

But these theories fine, and these castles of mine,
Which arose 'neath my enraptured eyes,
All tumbled to dust,—as such vagaries must,—
And tumbled to dust in this wise:

One evening I lay, in my hammock so gay,
And was trilling a song I had heard,
When a voice like a bell on my listening ear fell,
As it said, "Hear that 'cute little bird!"
Then a voice like a drum, with its resonant hum
(And a very nice voice, by the way),
Made reply, "Shoot the bird! let him warble unheard,
And listen to what I've to say"

Then I doubled up small in a soft little ball,
And pretended to be sound asleep;
But I winked my left eye, in a manner quite sly,
And indulged in a curious peep.

There they were, down below, in the twilight's soft glow,
A youth and a maiden so fair:
He as proud as a king, she a dear little thing,
With blue eyes, and long golden hair.
Now, it's sad to relate, but the old garden gate
Had all fallen in ruins to the ground;
They had naught to lean on, so the youth's manly arm
Encircled the maid's waist around.

"Goodness me! let me see," said I, up in the tree,
"If such really can be the case."
Then, said I, up above, "Those two souls are in love:
It's as plain as the nose on your face!"

For his eyes were aglow, and his tones soft and low,
Her white fingers he held in his own,
And the look in her eyes, in their shy, glad surprise,
Would have melted the heart of a stone.
He said many a nice thing, and gave her a ring,
And kissed her,—*indeed* it is so;
And she hung her shy head, blushed a bright, rosy red,
Blushed,—but still let him kiss her, you know.

(If I thought Jenny Wren would be half that sweet when
I tell her my love and my fears,
Oh! I'd fly to her bower in the fresh morning hour,
And pour out my soul in her ears.)

Well, my fond heart that night almost burst with delight
When she promised to be his dear wife;
And he kissed her again, and to me 'twas quite plain
That he loved her far more than his life.

Then he said he must go; but his footsteps were slow,
And the parting as sad as could be.
He passed down the glade in the fast-falling shade,
And the maiden stood under the tree.

"Now," said I, "she'll boo-hoo,—the girls always do
When their lovers go out of their sight;
She'll call him her king, and all that sort of thing,
And sit mooning here half of the night."

But the maid gave a laugh, and said "O the soft calf!
Didn't he swallow my taffy down, though?
Well, I'll wear his new ring,—it's a rather neat thing,
And shows I've another new beau."
Then she lifted her skirt, O the mean little flirt!
And went tripping away from my sight;
While I sat there and grieved for that fellow deceived,—
Wept, and prayed for him, half of the night!

So I'm Robin Readbreast, and I live in my nest,
Away up in the old apple-tree;
I've no use for the girls, lest their soft eyes and curls
Weave a web and a snare for poor me!

MISUNDERSTOOD.

Do you know what it is, on a stormy night,
 To grope down a long, dim hall,
 With a timid heart, and an outstretched hand
 That touches nothing at all?

Do you know what it is, when the throat is parched
 And a fever consumes the brain,
 To press to the lips an empty cup,
 And quaff, and quaff in vain?

Do you know what it is to think you hear
 A loved voice call you sweet,
 And to run, and find just silence there,
 And your shadow at your feet?

Do you know what it is to dream of one
 You love, and are parted from;
 To feel the clasp of the dear, warm hands,
 And the gaze of the tender, calm,

Familiar eyes? And to wake and find
 The moonlight lying still
 On the checkered floor, and the dews of night
 On your brow, so damp and chill?

To strain your eyes for a vanished form
 You could have sworn was there,
 And feel the warmth of a living cheek,
 Pressed up against your hair?

Do you know of the dearth of life and hope
 That comes with this silent brood
 Of helpless sorrows? Then you know
 What it is to be misunderstood.

FORT WORTH, July, 1890.

DE PROFUNDIS.

OH! I am tired and my heart is sick,
My feet are bruised, and the way is long.
Have mercy, Lord! I grope through trials thick;
My poor voice faints, it cannot lift a song.

The way is long; the stones are hard and sharp—
They pierce my feet; and yet I must go on:
For when I turn with hungry heart and eyes
To the dear past, its milestones are all gone.

No brother pilgrims on this lonely way
Have met, overtaken, or have passed me by;
Surely the only thing of life and breath
In all this way so desolate, am I!

And yet one day the sun shone, and the land
Smiled as it stretched before my eager gaze,
And happy pilgrims beckoned from the heights
To me, along those gentle flowery ways.

Where are thy people, Lord, and where their goal?
Or where am I? Have guide-posts false allured,
And am I lost in wildernesses dark,
Whose horrors none but I have thus endured?

I am oppressed w'th weight of weary woe;
The past is dead, the present is a blank;
And on the future's twilight misty shore
I see no signal to a harbor bank.

I stand like one out in the midst of space,
With naught beside, behind, nor yet before,
Who calls, and stretches out his empty hands.
Hearing and touching nothing, evermore.

Not e'en the footprint of a ghost is there,
No dim ideal of the days ago:
Just space, and silence, and the great Ego,
Appalling in its entity, alone!

Have mercy, Lord! If all things else are vain,
In pity send despair's last refuge, death.
What matter if there be, or not, the life
Beyond the veil of this short space of breath.

"To be, or not to be" it little boots
When one is anguished with the life to-day.
Oh, sweet the thought to still the aching heart,
And let to-morrow bring whate'er it may.

Oh, I am tired, and my heart is sick,
My feet are bruised, and the way is long!
Have mercy, Lord! The world will never know,
Nor feel the loss of this unfinished song.

TERRELL, Aug., 1887.

TO LILIAN WALLACE BREUSTEDT.

(AGED ONE MONTH)

THOU tiny, mighty, wondrous thing,
With bells of heaven still a-ring
In thy pink ears, and in thy eyes
The glow of summer, God-land skies,
Thou baby !

O tender little rose-leaf hand,
All pink and white, and dimples bland!
Thou holdest, in that palm so small,
A father's hope, a mother's all,
Thou baby !

O rosy, wavering, milk breathed mouth,
As fragrant as a bunch of south
Wind-kissed narcissus! in thy smile
The sun shines. Much dost thou beguile,
Thou baby !

O cunning little shell-tint feet !
Beware,—ye stand on heart's-ease, sweet !
On mother-heart, on mother-soul,
Beware, be tender, merciful,
Thou baby !

Smile on, dream on, dear elfin sprite ;
Yea, cry, and vent thy puny might
On mother breast, on grandsire's beard,
So only thou may'st live, be spared,
Sweet baby !

WACO, TEXAS.

OPENING OF THE MOON-FLOWER.

DEDICATED TO MRS. JULIA HALSELL, DECATUR, TEXAS.

THE sun lay prone upon his bed
Of gold and crimson in the west ;
The glory of his parting smile
Lay fair on vale and mountain crest.
A molten luminosity
Bathed all the land in amber glow,
While up the mountain, step by step,
Night trailed her shadowy garments slow.
A mocking-bird poured out his heart
Upon the dull ears of the day,
And cattle on the peaceful hills
Low'd as they took the homeward way.
A holy hush held all the world
Spell-bound, as though the finger tips
Of "Silence" touched the drowsy lids,
And pressed the mute but quivering lips
Of life. A passing breeze sang low,
As though afraid to break the spell ;
And half-guessed, in the hollow glade,
Came soft the tinkle of a bell ;
While deeper slept the day-god on,
And duller grew his crimson bed,
And lower down the western sky
Sank in the leaden clouds his head.
While, rising calmly from her couch,
The pale moon left her eastern bower,

Turning her silver chalice down,
Pouring its wine on shrub and flower,
Breathing her thrilling, potent breath
Upon her children slumbering there.
All day upon the trellis side
The moon-flowers, wondrous, wondrous fair!
They felt the mother-spirit brood,
They thrilled in breathless ecstasy,
They sighed and moved, and smiling oped
In matchless grace and purity;
As though a hand invisible
Had caught their waxen, snowy leaves,
Drawing apart the petals light
As sea-foam, softer than the breeze,
And whiter than the mountain snow,
Where nothing darker than God's smile
Hath touched it, where but angels' feet
Have pressed and blessed it all the while.
O flower incomparably fair!
O blossom of the gods divine!
Are white souls stirring in thy depths?
May not thy whiteness whiten mine?
Ah! emblem of the spirit's birth,
When day and turmoil pass, when pain
And passion die, when mortal lips
Breathe in the breath of God again,—
So may another sunset come.
When life's hot noon hath passed away
So may our white souls bloom again,
Responsive, at the close of day,
To Love mysterious, and divine,
That rules the great world night and day,
That heals a broken, contrite heart,
And holds the planets in their way.

ENCHANTED.

WHEN thou and I stand face to face
In God's clear sunlight, smiling,
I trust thine eyes, believe thy words,
Yield to thy laugh beguiling.

When thou art gone, alas! my faith
Goes sadly groping after,
Through quagmires deep of grave mistrust,
Where rings no echoed laughter.

What means it, dear? Why this at least,—
If thou would'st faithful prove me,
Go not at all, stay on and smile,
And I'll smile back, and love thee.

SYMPHONY NUMBER SIX (HAYDN).

AS PLAYED BY THE ELGIN BAND AT FORT WORTH SPRING PALACE,
MAY 26, 1890.

LIKE thistle-down, O Music ! on thy wings
Supernal mounts the shackled human heart,
Into that upper aura, fine and rare,
Where all things clogging, gross, fall swift apart,
Tossing the loosened soul to heights sublime
O'er clouds and planets, far from land or seas,
To soar, with cherubim and seraphim,
Atremble, in the zone of Pleiades.

O Music! born of voiceless soul-desire
To lift the earthy thoughts from mortal breast,
And sift them, like snow-mists, on Jura's sides,
Leaving the most ethereal, purest, best.
O toiling, grovelling world of work-a-day,
Creep, creep from out my senses and my eyes;
Leave not one murky film obscuringly
To tinge the blue of Fancy's summer skies.

Soft rest these tired orbs on swaying moss,
That sings of shady swamps and cypress bowers;
Sweet steals the balmy, soporiferous breath
Of new-made hay, and fresh, dew-laden flowers.

Dim, dim as sea-foam when the moon goes down,
And distant grow the faces, laughs, and sighs
Around me: off in other realms I float,
And trail my fingers on the mystic skies.

I lay my cheek against the velvet blue,
So cool, so deep, so beautifully pure,
While angel wings, a-flutter, waft my breath.
Such ecstasy no mortal can endure;—
Back to the rude world's din, the madding crowd!
Back to the sodden earth-land, once again!
Was that the theme's finale? Ah! thank God
For such a sweet surcease of life and pain.

FOREBODING.

LAST night I idly drew thy face
Against the lamp-lit wall,
Outlined upon a paper white
A profile,—that was all.
And yet, to-day, as here it lies
Upon my desk, so still,—
That silent, calm, familiar face,—
I feel a sudden chill.
I think, “So would my darling lie
If he were cold and dead:
The fine-cut, sensitive, sweet mouth;
The broad, white, smooth forehead;
So lie the long dark lashes on
The pallid cheek.” Ah! me!
It is a gruesome fancy, dear,
And fraught with agony.
I cannot read, nor write, nor think,
With thy dead face so near.
“I am a foolish creature?”—Yes,
A woman is a queer,
An unsolved problem, and her nerves
Sensitively attuned
To draughts blown from the spirit-world;
Too easy, far, to wound;
But easy, too, to cheer and thrill.
So, chide me not, for this;—
It is a foolish fancy. Well,
Dispel it—with—a kiss.

ODE TO A PERSIAN CHARM.

THY fragrance brings to me
No dreams of spicy Ceylon's isle,
No dark-eyed Hourî's balmy smile,
No languid, lotus-blossomed Nile,
No breeze of Araby;

But glow of lovèd eyes,
And touch of hand more dear to me
Than all the wealth of Araby,
And kisses warm as noontide sea
Beneath low, tropic skies.

Thou art, or wert, a toy
Picked up at random by his hands,
Because thou cam'st from distant lands,—
A message waft from India's strands
To a sad, thoughtful boy;

But now an idol thou.
Because that thou hast laid among
The homely garments for so long,
Breathing his breath, in sigh or song,
Therefore to thee I bow.

Thy odorous face I kiss,
And dream it is his soft brown eyes,
So full of mute but glad surprise,
Where love unspoke, yet speaking, lies,—
And this to me is bliss.

INSOMNIA.

O THOSE quiet hours of night,
When the fire-light flickers low,
And the grotesque shadows dance
On the walls—above—below,
All around the tensioned sight;—
O those quiet hours of night!

O those solemn hours of night,
When old Time lies dead between
The morrow and the yesterday,
While the watching hours lean
Shivering with damp and fright;—
O those solemn hours of night!

O those awful hours of night,
When grim darkness wraps the sea,
And the puny soul is awed
By the world's immensity,
And the spirit cowers, afright;—
O those awful hours of night!

O those lingering hours of night,
When the clock's unchanged refrain
With each hard, metallic click
Drives a nail into the brain,
And the spine is drawn so tight;—
O those lingering hours of night!

O those pulsing hours of night,
When the eyelids open wide,
And the Spirit and the Flesh
Stand by Self, on either side,
While Self pleads to stay their flight;—
O those pulsing hours of night!

O those witching hours of night,
When the loosened spirit stands,
Tip-toe, on the mountain top,
Gazing into future lands,
Striving hard to wing its flight;—
O those witching hours of night!

Oh! those ghastly hours of night,
When the ghosts of lovèd dead
Come on noiseless wings of air,
Hovering o'er the fevered head,
Quick'ning heart and brain and sight;—
O those ghastly hours of night!

O those purging hours of night,
When the poignant conscience wakes,
And the lightest deeds of day
Take on darkest, vilest shapes,
Till God's voice cries "Stop!" outright;—
O those purging hours of night!

* * * * *

O those blessed hours of night,
When the o'erwrought body feels
Sweet exhaustion coming on,
And the brain, chaotic, reels,
While Sleep's fingers bind the sight;—
O those blessed hours of night!

“ HE GIVETH HIS BELOVED SLEEP.”

IN MEMORY OF MABEL TERRELL.

SWEET child, they only of the earth,
 Earthy, have called thee dead.
Blessed beyond compare thy sleep,—
 Thy peaceful, sunny head
Low cushioned on the mother-heart
 Of silent Earth, thy hands
Soft folded on thy guileless breast,
 Till, on the silver strands
Of God's own shore of Blessedness,
 Thy gentle feet may rove,
Thy gladdened eyes behold His face,
 Thy heart beat to His love :
Never to dream life's fitful dream,
 And, waking, feel the pain
Of prescience, that 'tis sad to wake—
 That thou wouldst sleep again.

Brave little heart, that so aspired
 To tread life's higher ways :
That turned to books and usefulness,
 Away from childish plays :
Quaint little woman, with a head
 Away beyond thy years ;
And eyes anticipative, grave
 With unshed mother tears

Over life's pathos. Ah ! too well
Thy sensitive young soul
Sounded the world's great depths of woe,
And felt the sorrowful
God lent thee for a little while
To bless our earth. Thy face
Is here forever, and thy ways,
Shining with Christ-like grace,
Linger to light the rugged path
Our weary feet must tread.
Thou art not " gone " nor " taken hence "
Sweet child, thou art not " dead."

TERRELL, TEX.

A MOOD.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 16, 1890.

THE day is gray, and my life is gray.
A white mist lieth low
On grimy roof and attic pane,
And winds blow to and fro,
Dirge-like. O God ! I am so sad ;
Smile through Thy clouds, and make me glad.

Whence comes this over-tempered steel
Of brain and nerve, that makes me weak ?
A creature of the winds and rains,
Which earthward roaming spirits seek
To lay on heart and eyes and lips
Their ghastly, icy finger-tips ?

Out on the broad Atlantic wave,
What desolation in the skies !
No sunset bars, no silver path
Oped up to gates of Paradise !
O dreary stretch of leaden sea !
My kindred soul goes out to thee.

I want no bright nor gladsome thing,
No crown, nor gold, nor worldly fame :
In this bleak heart there is no room
For any guest of cheerful name.
I'd yield to Fate's relentless frown,
And sink full fifty fathoms down

In those gray waters, where is peace,
And no awakening with the morn,
To groan, and heave the old load up
On shoulders that are tired, and torn,
And bleeding. Christ, is aught so sweet
As death—that restfulness complete ?

“ To sit is better than to stand,
To lie is better than to sit,
To sleep is better than to lie ;
And death is only sleep,”—to wit,
I would be dead ! I reason so,
I see the way—but *dare* not go !

* * * * *

Peace ! Peace ! Look up, O soul supine !
What golden glinting in the west !
It is the sunset, fair and clear ;
At close of day there cometh rest.
Quick ! fling the lattice and the door ;
Drink in, O heart, life's balm once more.

“UNAVAILABLE?”

“Not print my poems for the Eastern mart?”

Because the world is busy?—will not hear
The sweet songs I have wrought them, brought them, aye,
Across a continent,—they will not hear?
Then I am desolate.

Why, in my heart are prairie breezes, fresh
And cool and soft as loving mother-hand
On fevered children's brows, and musical
As harps Æolian in Summer-land,—
Those prairie winds!

I thought the great tired world would be so glad
To rest awhile, and listen, by the way,
In attic rooms, and sun-baked, mortared walls;
And hot, dry feet on cobble-stones all day,—
Poor, toiling things!

But, “It is busy?” Oh! and I have flowers
Just as I plucked them on the sunny hills
Of Texas,—fresh, dew-sprinkled, sweet;
And caught up sparkles of the rocky rills,—
Such flowers and rills!

“They will not hear?” Ah me! ’twould do us good,
The singer and the listener. What were life
When songs and breeze and flowers and rills are dead,
And “Mind” and “Money” wage perpetual strife?
Poor, foolish world!

Where Hope and Faith stand fainting side by side,
And Greed and Gain press boldly to the fore ;
And gray-haired young men grasp and cheat and scheme ;
And old-eyed women, young, look young no more ?
Poor, hunted things !

Oh ! to uplift them in my strong, kind arms,
And bear them to the sweet hills and the vales,
The woods and prairies, and the rippling rills,
And voice of bird and cattle in the dales,—
Stern, forceful arms ;

And eyes steadfast, and voice invincible,
That says “ Lie still until the fever pass ;
You are most ill, and do not understand.
Here, press your temples on the dewy grass,—
Poor, aching head !

Quaff deeply these sweet waters, clear as light,
And breathe the tonic of the ripening hay ;
Drink in the warmth of sunshine and blue sky,
And learn to live and love this simpler way,—
This gentler way.”

“ But they are busy, and they will not hear ?”
Ah me ! my yearning heart is fit to break :
“ They will but hear of Tariff, Race, and “ Bills ” ?
They turn their heads and fold their arms, nor take
One little flower ?”

“ Forgive them, Father, for they do not know !”
Praise God, the flowers bloom new each golden spring ;
The south winds come back from the low, warm Gulf,
And songs born of the soul will wake and sing,
And I will hear.

Some day, the world will not so busy be ;
Some day these iron chains will rust and break,
And they will fall. Then will I lift them up,
And sing again, for Love's and Pity's sake,—
And they will hear.

Yet I am sad to see the pretty wreck
Of this year's blossoms, which no one will buy,
All wilted in my arms. Well, never mind,—
God does not charge me for them. He and I
Are quite good friends.

Would'st know the reason? Listen, very soft
(The world would laugh ; but it is really true),—
Because I take His breezes, rills, and flowers,
And weave them into daisy-chains for you !

NEW YORK, Sept., 1890.

TEXAS PRAIRIES.

I.

I LOVE the prairies in the early spring;
I know the promise in the dun bare sod
That lifteth up its seared face to the sun,
Waiting the resurrecting smile of God.
For long, drear weeks, a slumberous discontent
Stirs 'neath the dead grass,—like a wakened soul
Striving toward self-redemption; furrows break
Along the thawing surface, and there roll
Off toward the gulleys rivulets of tears,
Cold tears—but iris-tint with sheer delight
At broken barriers; while soft below,
The eager insect world creeps to the light.
Then rolleth gray clouds to their northern home,
Leaving blue rifts of heaven in between;
Then riseth warm mists from the Mexic Gulf,
Floating in white flecks on the azure sheen;
Then singeth low winds from the southern coast,
With dash of oleander and peach bloom
Fresh in the face; while from the distant wood
Cometh the woodpecker's insistent "boom!"
Now April taketh on a fickle mood,

And dark-gray clouds drape all the smiling sky,
A sultry langour steals into the air,
And all the zephyrs in profound sleep lie.
Warm rains descend as silently as tread
Of dove's feet on a meadow; day and night,
That fine, soft drizzle plieth on the earth,
Nor giveth hint of silver linings bright.
When lo! at sunset, long, red slanting bars
Lean from the west, and clasp the belted zone
Of zenith and horizon; and gold glints
Flash on the window-panes and belfry-stone.
A mocking-bird, in some sequestered bower,
Pours out a joyous, rapturous roundelay;
So falls the curtain on old Winter's bier,—
So lifts the curtain on sweet Spring's birthday.
When morning breaks, lo! all the sodden earth
Is carpeted with blossoms, blue and white,
Purple and yellow,—set in emerald
Of new-born grasses, tender, dewy-bright.
A pale narcissus noddeth on her stem
So pink and fragile in the wind's rude clutch,
And gold-heart buttercups coop up their leaves,
Greedy for sunshine, saying, "See how much
Of God-love we can hold!" then bob their heads
And closed their timid eyes, half-chilled, afraid
Of every ripple in the south-wind's laugh,
Of every white cloud's temporary shade.

So passeth childhood, full of fits and starts,
With hope unbounded,—like the prairie's ring,—
All birth and promise, sunshine, dew, and flowers!—
I love the prairies in the early spring!

II.

I dread the prairies in midsummer days,
When fruitage rots with overmellowing;
When wild flowers spread precocious, drouth-forced leaves,
Then fall lamenting, stricken, withering.
I dread the long curled waves of burning heat
That quiver, palpitating, near the ground,
Where field-larks cower, panting, open-mouthed,
Dying because no cooling pond is found.
When thirsty cattle stand in ripened hay
Knee-deep, and low across the dreariness,
Answered in sympathy unworded, dumb,
Pathetic in its patient helplessness.
When fierce siroccos sweep the red-hot sands
In blinding eddies o'er the sun-baked ponds,
And cacti—thriving salamander-like—
Thrust forth their hardy, purple-fruited fronds.

So panteth Life's high noon, intensified,
Forgetful of the spring when Life was fair,
Unheedful of the winter when Life dies!—
I dread the prairies in midsummer glare!

III.

I like the prairies in the autumn days,
When gold and russet glint the frosted grass,
When long warm sunbeams lie close to the earth,
Kissing the leafy brown pools as they pass.
I like the tall broom-weeds all silvered o'er
Like carven fretwork on Italian vase
Of blue enamel,—'gainst the azure sky,
Outlined along the low bank's muddy base.

I like the dark, kaleidoscopic line
Of wild geese trending southward, in the lead
Of first blue norther; and the red sumachs
Which, wounded, 'gainst the thicket lean to bleed.
I like the low wail in the northwest wind
Fresh from the Rockies, and the snow-clad plain;
I like the crunching of the crackled ice
Thin as a wine-glass is, just after rain.
I like the plover's piping, and the clear,
Soft "bob-white!" of the partridge in the grass;
And wild duck sailing on the steely ponds,
Their green necks scintillating as they pass.

So resteth Life, at harvest-time, when Peace
Sings in the heart, and fretful dreams allays,
And vain, ambitious longings, and regrets!—
I like the prairies in the autumn days!

IV.

I fear the prairies when old Winter comes,
And smites and sears them with his upas breath
Of ice and silence; and flings out his pall
Of snow, and hisses in the wind's voice "Death!"
I fear those great expanses,—solemn, white,
And rigid as a mortal body wrapped
In linen shroud; with stiffened feet below,
And pulseless hands on pulseless bosom lapped.
I hear the lone, lean wolf's appalling cry,
I see the wild-cat crouch where rabbits pass,
I hear the night-owl shriek despairingly,
And starving cattle crunch the juiceless grass.
I see the long, dun hay all southward bend

Before the blizzard's sweep, and shivering, sigh.
I see the dull sheet-iron curtain shake,
Back of the pale sun, on the leaden sky.
I see no fair Beyond; no golden West,
No rosy East! The sun seems endless set,
While up against the north stands gaunt Remorse,
And up against the south, black-veiled Regret!

So cometh winter in the aspiring heart,
When sets the sun of Hope, and Faith sublime,
When temples crumble and illusions fade!—
I dread the prairies in the winter-time!

A THANKSGIVING POEM.

Now, while the Northern world lies half asleep
And half awake, in Indian summer's haze,
Smiling, yet listless, like a rosy child
Just wakened in the firelight's dazzling blaze;—
Now, while the bright logs crackle merrily,
Texas, I'll "toss a bumper off," to thee!

Now, while the north winds strum upon the pane,
And Jack Frost steals on tiptoe o'er the land,
Tossing the flecks of carmine on the leaves,
From off the palette, in his reckless hand,
(Tipping my cheeks—and nose—right saucily!)
Texas, I'll lilt a brave "hurrah!" for thee!

Now, while the happy "Yankee" families
Rejoice about the gay Thanksgiving board,
With thought on roasted fowl and pumpkin pie
(And eyes uplifted to the bounteous Lord),—
While they give thanks for their prosperity,
Texas, I'll breathe an offering for thee!

Thou God who ruleth in the North and South,
And keepeth in the hollow of Thy hand
Thine own, in spirit,—whatsoever they be
In politics,—in all Thy ransomed land,—
On my heart's glowing altar, fair to see,
I lift my sunny home-land up to thee!

Bless all the people in her sunlit ways,
From dark Red River to the Gulf below,
From Rio Grande to the blue Sabine,
From slope magnolian to Panhandle snow,—
On all the ground that Texas foot doth press
I, kneeling, call thy grace and tenderness!

From Mem'ry's urn I lift the silver lid,—
I smell the fragrance of the prairies wide,
And low, sweet valleys, where the fertile earth
Lies, since the harvest, resting, sanctified
By garnered use! I almost catch the breath
Of late peach-blossoms, lured to certain death

By fickle Autumn, donning Spring's attire
Of mellow winds, and new, green tender grass, —
And silly wild-flowers, on the lowly sod,
Kissed into blushes as bold sunbeams pass!—
By mock-bird's song, and bluejay's impudence,
Tattling his sweet fibs on the old rail fence!

I yearn for home! my quick-chilled, thin, blue blood
Shrinks from the winter, in this dreary land
Of ice and snow! 'Tis Death's touch, to the tips
Of all the fingers on each busy hand!
The sun seems frozen in the light of day,
And sharp winds whistle from the leaden Bay!

Yet not in vain I sought this wondrous East,
In scope, resources, and its wide demand
For Science, Literature, Ideas, Art,
Gauged fairly, come they from whatever land!
So, grateful, loving, clasp I warm hands here,
But "heart goes back to Dixie," ever dear!

FRAGMENT FROM A ROMAN TRAGEDY.

DEDICATED TO MY FRIEND S. M. LAZARUS, THE ORIGINAL AND
ONLY "FABIAN," TERRELL, TEXAS.

SCENE—*A cell or dungeon, containing a bed and a table, on which burns an antique lamp. Fabian, seated in meditation, soliloquizes.*

AND this is I, Fabian, who, ten short weeks ago, trod gayly on the air of Forum, Campus Martius, and the Baths!—Fabian, whom kings and Romans envied, whom women and the gods did love; whose haughty mien bade higher titles stand, nor e'en so much as brush his garment's hem; whose tutored eye but caught the swift-winged glance of maid or matron, and smiles, like moonlight on Campania, broke,—blushes like spilled Falerian wine on damask snow; whose odorous locks Hyperion might have craved; whose lightest word held captive 'trothed or spouse, hanging upon his tones with nectar-melting, passion-breathing lips, like drunken bees on Colchian honeycombs!

Fabian! who at the Saturnalian feasts but cast an eye on gladiator's brawn, and said "So! good!" and straightway sesterces on sesterces piled, like Pelion on Ossa,—betting high odds on such, and saying, "Fabian hath called him good. Forsooth, the gods attend on Fabian's choice; he wins!"

Fabian, whose lightest finger-tips, laid in a woman's palm, sent thrill on thrill to chase the roses o'er her rounded cheek,

—like doves that shadow on the sand along the tawny Tiber; whose voice the consuls and the fathers heard, and smiled concessions in th' affairs of state!—aye, Fabian, the god of Lucia's heart, keeper of her sweet soul, ethereal, fine, that, quivering in the rude world's clutch, shrank and escaped, on pinions of Aurora, to the skies!

Lucia, my maiden with the tender eyes, the fragrant lips so sensitive, the silken hair, and clear white skin,—like gleam of marble from Pentelicus!

Lucia, who smiled, and all the earth grew radiant; whose airy feet on blossoms gently pressed, just bruised their subtle odors as she passed; whose taper fingers held the reins of Love, Ambition, and the heart's desires, guiding, restraining, comforting, until methought earth's ball Olympus, and myself thereon!

Lucia, who looked into my eyes, that evening 'neath the moon, and said, "I love thee, Fabian!" and all the gods did lean from Jove's high mount and say, "She loves thee, Fabian!"

But Lucia's dead!—aye, aye, she's very dead! Hence these white hairs that Sorrow hath defaced with ignominious semblance of old age! She's dead, I say, I know, I feel; and yet the heart incredulous, defiant, cries, "And what is *dead*?"

I know: the dead are cold. Lucia was warm as sun-kissed seas that swooning lie within the red-hot arms of Sirius—as warm and languid as lily-leaves upon the slumbrous Nile.

The dead are *still*! They answer not when loved ones call; they sigh not, thrill not, nor responsive smile; and Lucia all atremble was with life's red wine, youth's fire and movement! Aye, the dead are gone eternal from our sight!—they lie, with worms and hideous insects, in the nether earth, while flowers bloom on above, seductive! Liars, she is not there!

Ye gods bear witness that she is not there! but here—here, on this fond heart, her sunny head low drooped, her yielding, pulsing body 'gainst my own!

Ha! the old trick; and yet how real it seemed! These ghosts play havoc with a strong man's brain, e'en though it be a timid maiden's wraith!

Now reason, Fabian, thus and thus. Take out the gleam of madman from thine eye, the painful corrugations from thy brow. There, fold thy wild hands thus, and think. Such things can be—have been. Ah! that thou too well know'st.

Why, man, thy Lucia was but mortal, and she died: that's all there is to say. A fever fell upon her tender frame; 'twas strong and greedy, she was young and weak. It sucked her life-blood up, blanched the fair skin; the lustrous eye did dim. When life went out, she lay upon thy heart, which still beats on, unmindful of the fact that it hath echoed pulses from the other shore!

So strange a thing is life, tenacious of itself! The heart breaks, the soul sickens, aye, the hair grows white, torpid the blood, and yet we live; that is, breathe, laugh, and cry; eat, drink and sleep; and wake because there's nothing makes us die.

So Lucia died,—as any mortal may,—and she was buried. There the trouble lay. I could not leave her tomb!—my heart's best chords were there, twined in and out, between the slim, cold fingers in that grave; and when they raised me up, and bore my fainting body hence, all those chords snapped: the little, clinging fingers would not yield, and they, the wise fools, said, "It was the brain. Poor Fabian is mad!"

Ha! ha! a wondrous joke, indeed! Fabian mad! a rambling idiot he—the sanest, proudest Roman of them all.

And, ha! ha! ha! the ayes did have it too, and locked him up within this madman's cell.

'Twas horrible at first! but after-while the force of habit

softened agony. Indeed, where is the use in being free, when a man's soul is prisoned in a tomb?

Ah! Fate is kind. My Lucia comes ofttimes: when night and darkness guard the door, she noiseless comes, and all the gloomy distance rosy grows; these walls recede, and once again we stand beneath the stars, whose pure light lies like benedictial smile of god and cherubim. Her garments white are 'round me, and her breath, like zephyrs from the vale of Cashmere, fragrant, warm, blows on my cheek.

Her tender eyes beam soft yet clear into mine own, and sweet lips say, "I love thee, Fabian."

Ah! vile, triumphant demons! when I awake, clasping the poisoned air, or clinging to the cold, bare walls, I shriek—I shriek and curse. Why not? And then the keepers sigh and say, "Poor lunatic!" And so, you see, I'm mad: yes, past all doubt or cavil, I am mad.

Oh! had they known enough of man and love to leave me on her grave, till death and I had fought the battle out!

Why, I was young, and life would, after-while, have poured some balm into my hungry heart, to feed upon till chance had called me to her side on high.

But, gods of Cæsar! how I prate while Time is rushing on his wingèd steeds toward day! This little steel [*produces dagger*] shall be my soul's swift chariot to the gods!

It was a very madman's trick indeed that hath at last seduced this dagger from the wary guard! He held it in his hand unconscious, while I, in mood most sane, talked feelingly of war and foul conspiracies: how Rome was bleeding in the clutch of tyrants; of Cataline, Cæsar, Scylla. Aye, how very sanely did I prate of grave suspicions, seditions, bondage for the poor, till he grew frantic, clapped his forgotten steel upon the table here, and, grasping both my hands, swore hot faith in my sanity, abuse, and pledged his succor with th' authorities!

Ah! like a tigress when she creeps upon her prey, so crept my swift hand to the weapon; then, concealing safe within my tunic thus, I started, listened, thrust him from the room, explaining some one coming, and the fear that his sympathy and my design might be betrayed.

Ha! Fabian, well and boldly done! Ho! Death, another offering at thy shrine! Soft—turn the light so! Aye, but thou art keen, my slender beauty; thou'lt find the quickened heart, like flash of Jove's own fire, and ope the way to Lucia! [*Stabs himself.*]

Sweet, I come. Reach down thy gentle hand and take mine own; 'tis dreary dying in a madman's cell. Oh! soft the moonlight on the Tiber lies, and soft thy smile when sweet lips say, "I love thee, Fabian!" Hence come I,—and the gods forgive! The world was black without thee! Now, thy—lips!—say—once again—"I—love—thee—Fa—" [*He dies.*]



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